

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing more robust growth (at about 2.5 percent) than in previous years, which were characterized by “sub-par performance.”

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 33 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The president is elected to a five-year term by a majority of the combined houses of Parliament, though executive authority rests with the prime minister. Parliament consists of the 41-member House of Representatives and the 31-member Senate; members of both houses are elected to five-year terms. The president appoints 16 senators on the advice of the prime minister, 6 on the advice of the opposition, and 9 at his or her own discretion.

Faced with a no-confidence vote, Prime Minister Patrick Manning of the People’s National Movement (PNM) called for the dissolution of Parliament in April 2010 and elections in May. Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s People’s Partnership (PP) coalition—comprising the United National Congress (UNC), the Congress of the People, and the Tobago Organization of the People—won 29 of 41 seats, while the PNM took only 12. Persad-Bissessar became prime minister.

Tobago is a ward of Trinidad and is governed locally.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

The 2010 PP victory ended nearly 40 years of PNM rule. Political parties are technically multiethnic, though the PNM is favored by Afro-Trinidadians, while the UNC is affiliated with Indo-Trinidadians. The PP coalition was multiethnic.

The Indo-Trinidadian community continues to edge toward numerical, and thus political, advantage.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Trinidad and Tobago suffers high-level corruption. Trinidad’s Integrity Commission, established in 2000, has the power to investigate public officials’ financial and ethical performance. Following the resignations of several commission members in 2009 due to suspicions of their ineligibility to serve, including because of allegations of malfeasance, a new Integrity Commission was appointed in 2010. In 2013, Minister of National Security Jack Warner resigned in response to a report that he was involved in financial misbehavior while he served on the regional football association CONCACAF.

Drug-related corruption extends to the business community, and a significant amount of money is believed to be laundered through front companies. The 2000 Proceeds of Crime Act imposes severe penalties for

money laundering and requires that major financial transactions be strictly monitored. Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 85 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed. Press outlets are privately owned and vigorously pluralistic. There are three daily newspapers and several weeklies, as well as private and public broadcast media outlets. Internet access is unrestricted. In February 2014 the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT) expressed its disappointment that the Defamation and Libel Act 2013, which included controversial language on libel and defamation (Section 8), has the potential to limit freedom of the press.

In May 2014, journalist Mark Bassant had to flee Trinidad and Tobago after receiving death threats from criminals about whom he had reported negatively. The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) urged local authorities to ensure Bassant's protection, but some observers claim the police were colluding with those threatening him.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the government honors this provision in practice. Academic freedom is generally observed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are respected. Civil society is relatively robust, with a range of interest groups engaged in the political process. Labor unions are well organized and politically active, though union membership has declined in recent years. Strikes are legal and occur frequently.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The judicial branch is independent, though subject to some political pressure and corruption. Rising crime rates have produced a severe backlog in the court system. Corruption in the police force, which is often drug-related, is endemic, and inefficiencies result in the dismissal of some criminal cases. Trinidad and Tobago has a mandatory death sentence for murder on the books, though no one has been executed since 1999. Most prisons are severely overcrowded.

Most abuses by the authorities go unpunished. A 2014 Amnesty International report continued to criticize the use of excessive force by police and the failure to investigate it. In December 2014, a video was released showing two police officers abusing a man in a wheelchair.

The government has struggled in recent years to address violent crime. Many Trinidadians of East Indian descent, who are disproportionately targeted for abduction, blame the increase in violence and kidnapping on government and police corruption. In 2014, 403 murders and 94 kidnappings occurred. In May 2014, a former senator, Dana Seetahal, was assassinated after shots were fired at her vehicle. In June, fifteen-year-old Jamal Brathwaite and his nine-year-old brother Jadel Holder were shot in the back of the

head execution style. Murders in Trinidad have become more brutal (e.g., beheadings), which the Council on Hemispheric Affairs attributes to an uptick in gang activity. In January 2014, prime minister called the increase in violent crime in Trinidad and Tobago “completely intolerable.” To address crime, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar announced in December 2014 that the government will try to reintroduce the so-called hanging bill—an amendment to reintroduce executions—in 2015.

Racial disparities persist, with Indo-Trinidadians comprising a disproportionate percentage of the country’s upper class. Same-sex sexual relations are illegal, though the law is not generally enforced. Human rights groups have criticized the government’s unwillingness to address the discrimination and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) persons in Trinidad and Tobago. A proposed change to legislation that would have extended death benefits of civil servants to include same-sex domestic partners was rejected in 2013.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Women hold 12 seats in the House of Representatives and 6 seats in the Senate. Domestic violence remains a significant concern. A draft National Gender and Development Policy was submitted to the Cabinet in 2012 but never approved.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)